

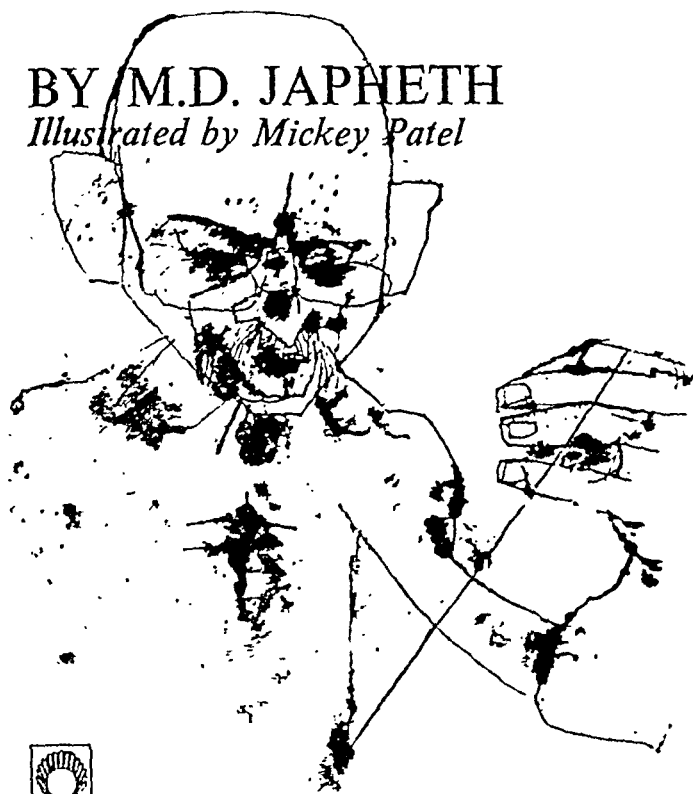


MAHATMA GANDHI

A STORY OF OUR TIME
AND FOR ALL TIME

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PREFACE

THE range of Gandhian literature being what it is, if writing a new book on Mahatma Gandhi is a privilege, justifying it is an achievement.

We have, it seems, reached a point of saturation, a stage of Gandhian thought and interpretation beyond which nothing that is written on the Mahatma can be new, or necessary.

This is a point that should and must be considered, even by the present writer. Nevertheless, is it not possible that though something may not be new, it can still be necessary?

Take, for instance, Niagara Falls, or a sunset, or a singing bird. These bounties and manifested beauties of God and Nature are certainly not new, but can anyone, endowed with a thinking head or a feeling heart, deny that they are necessary?

Indeed, can it ever be maintained that if one sees, admires and thrills to Niagara Falls once, one need not or cannot do so again ... and again ... and again?

Here it might be relevant to remind ourselves of how a word picture was once painted of another great one of history, Abraham Lincoln:

“There is no new thing to be said about Lincoln. There is no new thing to be said of the mountains or of the sea, or of the stars. The years go their way, but the same old-mountains lift their granite shoulders above the drifting clouds; the same mysterious sea beats upon the shore; the same silent stars keep holy vigil above a tired world. But to the mountains and sea and stars, men turn forever in unwearied homage. And thus with Lincoln. For he was a mountain in grandeur of soul, he was a sea in deep undervoice of mystic loneliness; he was a star in steadfast purity of purpose and service. And he abides.”

Truth, Beauty, Love...these aspects of and pointers to the Eternal Life and all that it implies... who can say that they are for the passing hour, or the fleeting moment? How can these radiant and resplendent aspects be confined and restricted to the Now, the Today or the once-is-more-than-necessary?

Many will maintain that Gandhi the man is distinct from Gandhism the creed, and that, while, as a way of life and a philosophy, the latter can bear retelling, enough has already been said and written about the former. The fact is, however, that Gandhi and Gandhism are inseparable entities, with the creed

fully integrated in the man. This is possibly one of the reasons why he has become one of history's most discussed figures. There are, moreover, ample indications that the process is as yet far from complete.

The purpose of the present book is not merely to tell the story of Gandhi or just to enunciate the tenets of Gandhism. Both these tasks have been performed a number of times. The purpose here is to tell a story and stress a philosophy in a manner that will convey the over-all impression, and perhaps the conviction, that Gandhi was much more man than God, and that Gandhism is much more a necessity than a luxury.

In this particular context, the story of Gandhi should be told, and retold, and the philosophy of Gandhi should be stressed, and re-stressed, as long as tongue can speak and ear can listen, as long, also, as mind can think and heart can feel.

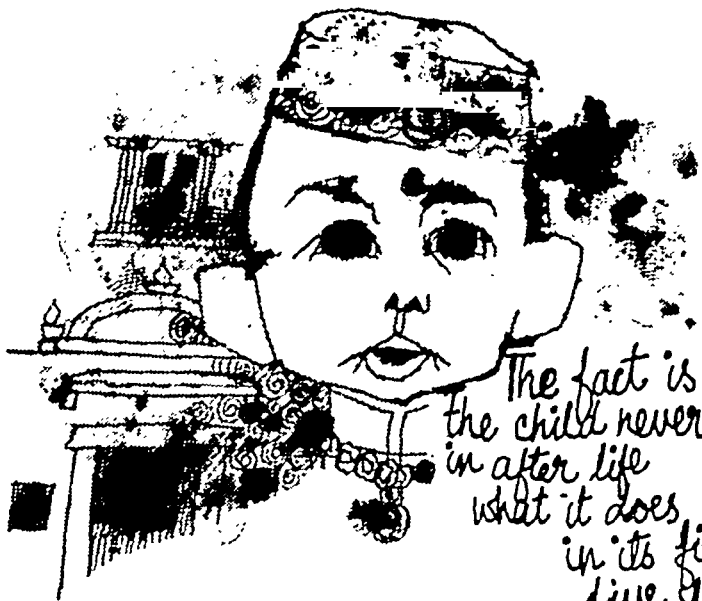
It is a story that is an integral part of the larger pattern of life itself, a saga that combines the majesty of Niagara Falls with the splendour of a sunset and the lyrical, exquisite beauty of a singing bird.

More than a story, the life, the work, and the thoughts of Gandhi constitute signposts to those



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The fact is that
the child never learns
in after life
what it does
in its first
five years.
The education
of the child
begins with
conception.

THE day dawned like any other day. As the sun rose on this day, no one guessed that it was going to be known as one of the most important days in the history of the world.

The day was the 2nd of October 1869, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, who because of his life and work for the freedom and progress of India, will be remembered as the Father of this country.

A hundred years ago, when Gandhi was born, India was quite a different country from what it is today. It was governed not by its own leaders but by a foreign country, from where men and women travelled over thousands of miles to rule over India's millions of people.

Many attempts had been made to free India from the shackles of slavery.

In 1857, some brave and wise people of India came together and waged a war for the freedom of this country. This was known as the Great Rebellion.

India's men and women fought bravely, but they were finally conquered by the superior might of the foreign rulers.

As a result, India was forced to settle down to many more years of being ruled by people who were not wanted, and in a manner that was certainly not liked, because this rule was not good or healthy for the country.

This was the India in which Gandhi was born and grew up. His name was Mohandas Karamchand, but as he reached his years of manhood, and became famous all over the world, he was known less by his two first names and more as Mahatma (great soul) Gandhi.

He spent his childhood and early boyhood in the town of his birth, Porbunder, on the west coast of India. He grew up in a good home provided by his devout and God-fearing parents. They little knew at the time that their beloved son was destined to be a turning-point in the history of India.

If you want to save
the people, it is
essential to observe
the vows of Truth-
Ahimsa, Celibacy,
non-stealing,
non-possession and
control of the palate.



M U C H later in life, Gandhi acquired a very progressive outlook on religion, custom and tradition. But as a boy, he followed all the customs of his forefathers, and was thus married, at the early age of thirteen, to a girl who was about the same age. Her name was Kasturba.

When he was about eighteen, Gandhi left the shores of India. He sailed for England, for studies in law. Before leaving, he promised his religious-minded mother to lead a chaste life on foreign soil.

For a short time, Gandhi took to English dress, manners and habits. But the promise given to a loving mother by a dutiful son could not easily be forgotten. And so, Gandhi soon returned to the simple life.

Both by instinct and custom, Gandhi was against meat-eating. While in London, he joined the Vegetarian Society of that city, and worked actively for its progress. He completed his studies in 1891, and soon returned to India, to commence his legal practice.

Fate, however, had other plans, and was working fast behind the scenes. The turning-point, a great one for Gandhi, for India and for the world, came in the year 1893.

In that year, he left for South Africa on an important case. No one knew at the time that with this voyage to a strange land, Gandhi was raising the curtain on a great drama that was to last for fifty-five years.

He went to South Africa as a lawyer, to fight a case. Once there, he remained as a leader, to fight for a cause. As the saying goes, the hour brought forth the man, and Gandhi soon found himself in the midst of history.

How did all this happen? What was this great cause that found a champion in Gandhi? And why was it so important—for India and the rest of the world?

Let us find the answers to these questions, and let us witness, and ponder over, the great drama of the Gandhian age, in the following pages.



Anyone who
pursues Truth,
must bid goodbye
to fear.
Truth can never
be vanquished.
Our struggle is
in human liberty,
human dignity.
Are you prepared
to face bullets if need be?

WHAT happened in South Africa for about twenty years, from 1893 to 1913, was significant not only for Gandhi and India but for all men and women, in all countries.

It was a turning-point not only for one man, and his people but for the political philosophy of the entire world. Let us now find out for ourselves what happened, and why it was so important.

When we read through, from one page of the history of mankind to another, we find that great men—and also women—of destiny appear on a particular scene just when they are needed for a particular purpose.

Gandhi, who was born to guide, to lead and to inspire, found himself in South Africa when the Indians in that part of the world were being subjected to various restrictions and suppressions that denied them all rights of citizenship.

Gandhi now did something that was to make his name ring all over the world as the leader of an oppressed people who led them from virtual slavery to actual salvation with a method that was unique.

The leader and his people fought a battle that was

hard and long, and because it was a battle for a just cause, it was fought well, and ultimately, after many years, it was won.

It was a battle in which there was no tumult and no shouting, no bitterness, no weapon and no bloodshed. It was a battle which was fought with the effective weapon of self-suffering, and in which soul-force was pitted against brute-force.

Gandhi organised his battles for freedom with wisdom. He grouped his fighters in batches of satyagrahis, the literal translation of which is men and women who dedicate themselves to a cause on the basis of truth, non-violence and soul-force.

These freedom-fighters, under Gandhi's inspiring leadership, fought with courage, determination and dedication against slavery and oppression and then, willingly, and happily, paid the penalty.

WHEN all this was happening, the rest of the world sat up, as if by a jolt, and took notice of what was going on.

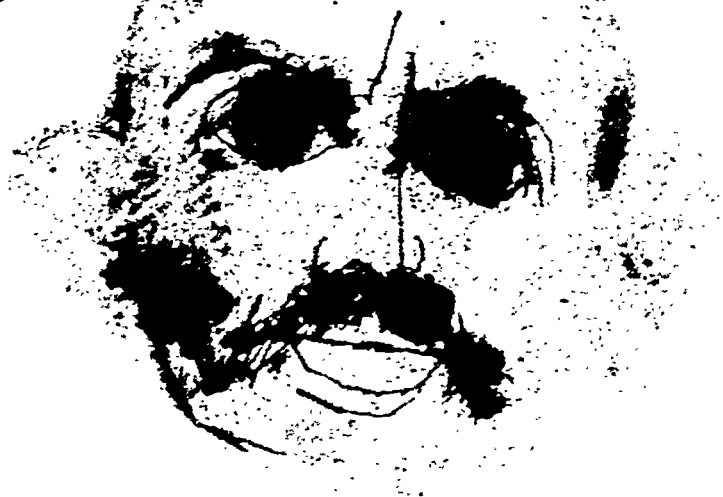
In Gandhi, the world was beginning to recognise not just a leader who was fighting for freedom but a prophet who was heralding the dawn of a new age.

This would be the age in which the spirit of man would assert itself and come into its own. This would also be the age in which, after thousands of years, such things as Truth, Love, Faith and Courage would be made to step down from the pages of the sacred books of all religions and become the basic laws of our everyday life.

For thousands of years, men and women had been taught to pray for the age when peace would reign over all the earth like a mighty monarch, when the lion would sit by the side of the lamb and when men would change their swords into plough-shares.

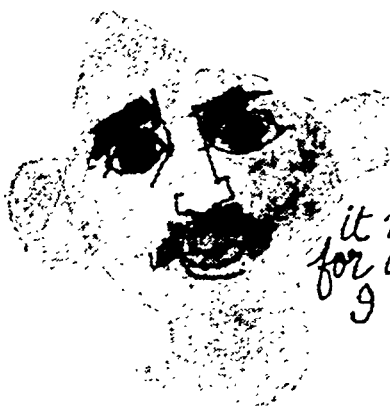
For such good things men and women had prayed, and for such things they had hoped. And then they waited for their prayers to be answered, and for their hopes to be fulfilled. But nothing happened. For all the praying and hoping had been done only in words.

Man's delight in renunciation
differentiates him from the beasts.
Some demur that life thus understood
becomes dull and devoid of art, and
leaves no room for the householder.
But these critics fail to grasp the
true meaning of renunciation, which
does not mean abandoning the world
and retiring into the forest, but rather
the infusion of the spirit of
self-sacrifice into all the
activities.



Then came Gandhi, to change words into deeds. And as he acted, Gandhi gave this message to a startled and surprised world:

“...we have chosen our remedy. It is that of fighting evil by opposing to it good. Such suffering is a process of purification. It involves a continual rejection of the grosser elements and a cultivation of the finer in us. Thus viewed, the prolongation of the struggle need not dismay us, we may even welcome it. Victory consists, not in obtaining what we want but in having suffered for the attainment of our object. The fulfilment will not be victory, it will be merely an indication thereof. For those who recognise this simple truth there is no such thing as defeat. Every man has it in his power to suffer to the uttermost. And this is the meaning of passive resistance.”



Freedom is to
be wooed inside
prison walls
and sometimes
on the gallows.
Ahimsa is not simply
non-injury to others -
it means love
for all that lives.
I love the enemy
but I fight evil.



How and why did Gandhi, the natural and acknowledged leader of an oppressed people, evolve such a political philosophy? This is a question that should be asked by anybody who sincerely wishes to ascertain the facts about the man and his times.

We should remember in the first place, that, as staunch Hindus, Gandhi's parents, particularly his mother, had a profound influence over him, and his thoughts. This influence functioned as a solid moral foundation throughout his life and work.

The soil was thus rendered fertile for the seed that was to fall on it in later life. This seed was provided by the writings of such masters of thought as Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau, the great literary figures of Russia, England and America, respectively.

Gandhi devoured their writings, all of which stressed the moral and spiritual aspects of human progress. He thus imbibed, in due course, the best and the most fruitful of human thought.

Destiny seemed to be at work to prepare and equip him for the great work that lay ahead.

This work commenced soon after he returned to India in 1915. He was now known and respected not

only in India but all over the world. The laurels of victory that became his after his history-making and successful struggles in South Africa he wore with humility and grace.

Once back in India, he travelled far and wide, visiting many places, meeting many people and making his influence felt, as a great leader, as a clear and brave thinker and as a good man. India was becoming increasingly aware of Gandhi, the man who almost seemed to belong to another world.

After about five years of such preparation, Gandhi received the heavy mantle of India's national leadership in 1920, following the death of Tilak, who, before Gandhi, had been recognised as the father of the country's freedom movement. After the happenings in South Africa, an even greater drama was soon to begin in India.

WE now come to a phase in Gandhi's life—about fifteen years—that was the most eventful and significant, for him, for India and for the world.

Before we enter this phase, before the curtain goes up on this great drama of the twentieth century, it will be necessary to acquaint ourselves with some important aspects of Gandhi's political philosophy, in order that we may understand and appreciate this dramatic period.

Gandhi's main objective, indeed, his life's work, was the freedom of India. In this guise, he was one of history's many staunch patriots and fighters for freedom.

It was, however, with the means that he adopted to achieve this end that Gandhi made history. These means, as we all know, were based on his famous creed of non-violence, but this in turn involved many factors, all of which functioned with many advantages for all concerned.

Among these many factors, the two most important were Gandhi's stress on his belief that no freedom is of any value if it is merely an outer imposition, and not an inner urge.



Strength does not come from
It comes from an indomitable
Non-violence does not mean weak
to the will of the evil-doer but the power
of one's whole soul against the will of
Working under this law of our being
it is possible for a single
to defy the whole might
of an unjust empire
and lay the foundation
for that empire's
or its regeneration

Hence he believed that if we concentrate on our own moral and spiritual progress, we shall be free men and women, regardless of the political conditions under which we may be living.

It was with this belief that Gandhi once said: "We are not at war with individual Englishmen. We seek not to destroy English life... he who will may see that this is a religious, purifying movement. We are leaving off drink. We are trying to rid India of the curse of untouchability. We are trying to throw off foreign tinsel and splendour, and, by reverting to the spinning wheel, reviving the ancient and poetic simplicity of life..."

Thus, according to the philosophy of Gandhi, a successful fight for true freedom should be based on the strong pillars of PREPARATION. TRAINING, QUALIFYING AND PROGRESS.

It should be clearly understood that this philosophy of non-violence is not a negative creed of NOT killing, NOT hurting and NOT destroying but a positive process of development and growth.

In its most positive form, non-violence involves, and thrives on, such noble attributes as Truth, Love,

Courage and Faith, all of which, like the quality of mercy is, as Shakespeare said, twice blessed, blessing him that gives and him that takes.

Just as a plant, a fruit or a flower needs water, earth and sunshine in which to grow and blossom, so does non-violence need Truth and Love, and the good things that they beget, to reach its stage of greatest value to all.

Gandhi puts it this way: "the religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the rishis and the saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law—to the strength of the spirit...I want India to practise non-violence being conscious of her strength and power. I want India to recognise that she has a soul that cannot perish and that can rise triumphant above every physical weakness and defy the physical combination of a whole world."



I know that the drastic reversal of practically the whole of the aggressive programme may be politically unsound and unwise, but there is no doubt that it is religiously sound. The country will have gained by my humiliation and confession of error. The only virtue I want to claim is truth and non-violence. I lay no claim to superhuman powers. I want none.

WHEN Gandhi assumed the leadership of India in 1920, the country was emerging from the grim shadow of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy in which almost four hundred Indian men, women and children lost their lives when they were fired upon by British soldiers under the orders of General Dyer.

The country was in an ugly mood, and hence it was no easy task for Gandhi, who loved peace as much as he loved freedom, to divert the resentment of his countrymen from personalities to principles. He thus sponsored the idea of burning foreign cloth as a means of providing an outlet for the pent-up sentiments of men and women all over India.

Now commenced the first of Gandhi's movements for freedom based on non-violence and non-co-operation. In response to his call, men and women flocked to his banner, having abandoned their normal, day-to-day activities as a sacrifice to the cause of freedom.

Lawyers came out of court-rooms, students left their classrooms and, perhaps most significant of all, the women of India forsook hearth and home to join in the great march towards freedom.

- All seemed to be going very well indeed. Thousands, of course, were sent to jail, but these

patriots, under the inspiration of their leader, paid the price of their patriotism with brave smiles and an almost unique pride and pleasure.

The movement, however, was not destined to be crowned with success. Something happened that was to alter the entire course of events. The year was 1922. Just when, to use the words of a high British official, "Gandhi came within an inch of success," violence of a rather brutal nature marred the movement at a place called Chauri Chaura. Here peasants attacked a police station and twenty people were killed, including four policemen.

This was enough for Gandhi, who now revealed himself as much more of a saint than a politician. He cried a halt to the entire movement, realising as he did in a flash that his people had not as yet imbibed the true message of his creed of non-violence.

Despite the protests of his friends, followers and colleagues all over the country, Gandhi was adamant in his decision, which, to him, implied "a political defeat but a religious victory."

With such a leader at the helm of affairs, India, it seemed, would have to wait a long time for the dawn of freedom. Nevertheless, while she waited, she was to

grow sadder, though much wiser, through the many lessons which she learnt.

Shortly after his great decision, Gandhi was arrested and, following a trial that made history, he was sent to jail for six years. In 1924, however, he had to undergo an operation for appendicitis, and after this he was released, purely on medical grounds.

He now devoted all his time and thought to the big question of harmony and concord among the two major Indian communities of Hindus and Muslims. He realised that it was only a matter of time before the freedom struggle would have to be resumed, and for this he wanted India to be strong in her unity.

WITH the freedom movement now virtually at a standstill, Gandhi took time off to work as hard and as well as he could to bring the Hindus and Muslims of India together on the platform of national unity.

This was the sort of work that by its very nature provided much food for thought. India, as well as the outside world, now began to realise that the Mahatma had evolved a method of fighting his non-violent battles on many fronts.

When the actual battle was on, Gandhi expected his people to fight as a united nation, to fight with one end: freedom, in all its manifestations, and to fight with the means of non-violence, in all its implications.

When, for some reason or the other, the battle was off, Gandhi utilised the period prior to the next battle as an opportunity for more preparation, more training and more qualifying. This meant that India's fight for freedom, whatever be the form, was a continuous affair.

Gandhi's personal contribution to the preparation and training of his people used to be his fasts, which

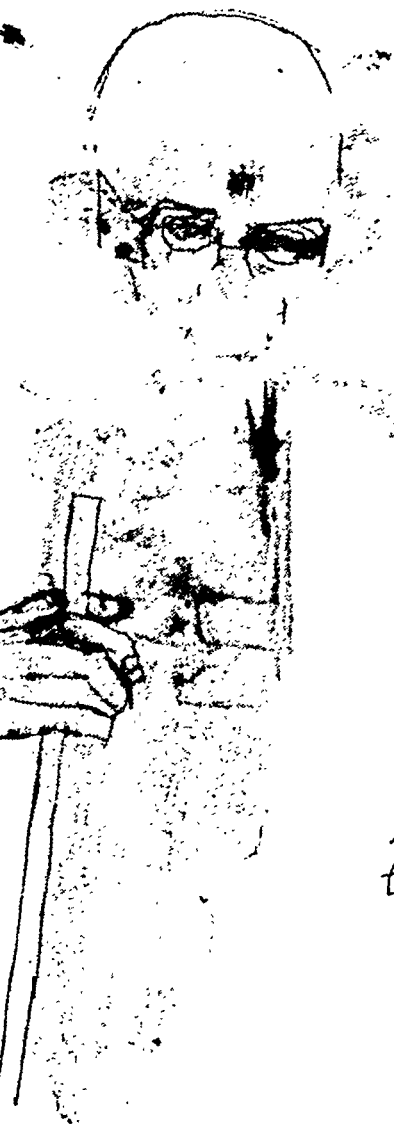
he would observe for various periods, as the need arose.

The purpose of these fasts was a threefold one. In the first place, they were intended as a process of self-purification, a means of acquiring and maintaining inner strength.

Secondly, they served the purpose of reminding his people of their continuing duty to adhere to truth, non-violence and love. And thirdly, the fasts were intended to win the heart of the opponent by the spectacle of a great and a good man willingly undergoing self-inflicted suffering.

The intervening period of preparation began in 1922, when Gandhi called off the freedom movement and was arrested. It ended in 1928, when the second round of non-violent action again loomed on the horizon.

Early in 1928, there were demonstrations all over the country against what was known as the Simon Commission. This was so called because it was led by Sir John Simon, who came to India in order to study the situation in the context of the freedom movement and recommend political reforms to the British Government.



To a people famishing and idle, the only form in which God can dare appear is of food as wages. God created man to eat food and said that those who are without food are thieves. We must think of millions who are less than animals, almost in a dying state. The argument that is drawing India to the

According to Gandhi, this was a wrong method of attempting to solve the problem, if only because the Commission was an all-British affair, and did not include a single Indian.

The demonstrations that had been organised against the Commission were peaceful and also effective. It was confronted everywhere with placards bearing the words "Go Back, Simon!"

These demonstrations, however, exacted a tragic price from India. While participating in one of them, a much loved and respected patriot of India, Lala Lajpat Rai, from the Punjab, was seriously injured in a clash with the police. He died shortly after, leaving a shocked and pained nation to mourn his loss.

Later that same year, an agitation of a different sort commenced in a place called Bardoli, in the province of Gujarat. This also was blessed by Gandhi, and was conducted and concluded successfully by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who, on this occasion, first revealed himself as a great leader and a man of iron will.

The imposition of a harsh and unfair land-tax was the cause of Bardoli's non-violent uprising against the

foreign government. The movement put the entire nation in the mood for the next struggle—a gigantic one—that was soon to sweep over India from one end to the other.

GANDHI continued to work behind the scenes until the beginning of 1930. In that year, he was in the forefront again, leading India in one more of her non-violent battles for freedom.

This time, the country's mood, and her manner of fighting, were different. As far as the mood was concerned, it was determined and shaped on the 31st of December 1929, when, at an assembly held under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was later to become free India's first Prime Minister, India unfurled her flag of freedom and set herself anew to the grim task ahead.

Nehru himself spoke of this period as one in which there was "thunder in the air". Never were words more truly uttered, or written.

Once the struggle started, Gandhi did something that electrified the nation, and made big news all over the world. This something was his famous and history-making Dandi March of 1930, which took place, as if by an auspicious coincidence, in the month of March.

What was this all about? Let us see for ourselves.

The great march may well be presumed to have been based on three of Gandhi's main beliefs. In the first place, he believed, to use his own words, that "humanity hankers after symbolism"; this belief played a decisive part in his life and work. Secondly, he believed that action speaks much louder than words; And thirdly, that since it was an important article of food for India's millions of have-nots, salt should become a symbol of India's struggle for freedom.

The main purpose of the Dandi March, therefore, was to proclaim these three beliefs to India and to the world at large. With a small band of followers, which seemed to become larger with every mile, Gandhi set out from his home in Sabarmati, on the outskirts of the city of Ahmedabad, for Dandi, a coastal town about 240 miles away.

The march covered a period of about ten days. Gandhi was then 61 years old. After they reached the seashore of Dandi, Gandhi led his band of followers in breaking the salt law of the foreign government by making salt illegally.

At that moment, symbolically speaking, India became free. An expectant India and an admiring world watched and waited, and asked "what next?"

Once launched, the movement raged all over the country, its fortunes rising and falling like all struggles for freedom throughout history. Many unjust laws were broken, and many more thousands of India's patriots, who were considered to be law-breakers by the foreign government, were sent to jail.

The "thunder in the air" continued to rumble with its message of determination and defiance. The great battle for freedom progressed from one stage to another, while, at the other end of the field, the foreign rulers tried hard to solve the problem of India's determination to be free.

A glimmer of hope was provided by the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931, on the basis of which some sort of an accord was reached between the Mahatma and Lord Irwin, the British Viceroy.

This accord, however, was short-lived, for the next Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, followed a much harder line in his policy of ruling India. The new Viceroy assumed charge in April 1931, and in October that year, Gandhi was persuaded to attend a Round Table Conference in London as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress.

This Conference yielded no concrete results in terms of India's basic demands, and Gandhi returned to India a disappointed man, "with hands that were empty of freedom but full of the country's honour".

How can men ~~feel~~ feel themselves
honoured by the humiliation of
their fellowmen?



EARLY in 1932, India's freedom struggle assumed a new force, with a resolute Gandhi at one end and a determined Viceroy at the other. There were more law-breaking acts, more arrests and more thousands in British jails. In due course, Gandhi himself was accorded the "supreme privilege".

As Viceroy and custodian of British interests in India, Lord Willingdon ruled with good intentions and little else besides. As a firm ruler of the 'no-nonsense' school of thought, he was so conscious of his duty that he overlooked some of the great lessons of history.

One of these lessons, which, it seems, is hardly ever paid heed to, is that firm rule and a show of force are never a match for a people who want freedom, who fight for freedom and who do so with weapons of goodwill and the shield of truth.

Gandhi's freedom movements were bound to succeed because, before leading his followers into non-violent battle, he taught and trained them to face bullets and other weapons bravely, to suffer the consequences of their acts willingly and to smile through all their self-inflicted troubles.

Thus, if the struggle of 1932 came to an end without any tangible or specific result, it did serve the

purpose of revealing the true strength of Gandhi's India and the temporary nature of foreign rule.

From this struggle, India emerged more determined, and the ruling power more conscious of the fact that the prevailing state of affairs could not continue indefinitely.

At the end of this struggle, and on his release from prison, Gandhi set his head and his heart to a matter that was of deep concern to him.

He had always been deeply pained to observe the plight of India's untouchables, who constituted that section of the people who were considered to be outside the Hindu fold.

Before he was released from prison, Gandhi had undertaken a fast to focus national and international attention on India's untouchables, and to prevent their segregation as a separate community. He broke his fast only when some sort of an understanding on this vexed matter was reached between him and the leader of the untouchables, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

On the basis of this agreement, a moral revolution took place within the bounds of Hinduism. The prejudice of centuries seemed to melt before the heat

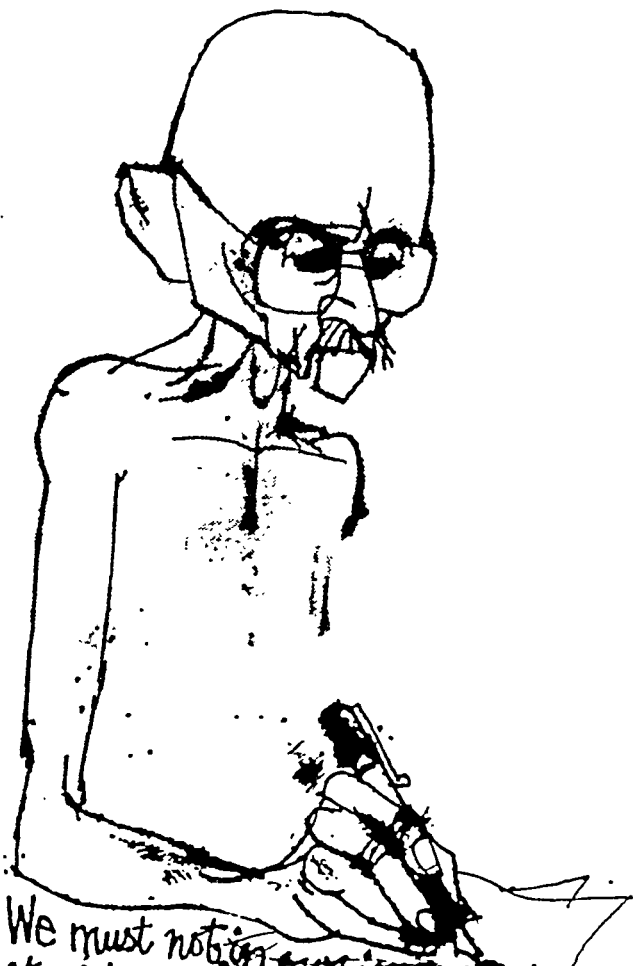
of the Mahatma's crusade, and soon temples and homes were thrown open to the untouchables.

The event was, in effect, the emancipation of India's slaves, something similar to what happened in America when slavery was abolished in that country! Another turning-point in India's history! Another moral triumph for Gandhi!

In millions of hitherto untouchable homes, and in more millions of untouchable hearts, Gandhi was now worshipped as a god. He was recognised as a moral force whose onward march nothing and nobody could stop.

The British Parliament, meanwhile, had been busy devising and formulating some plan or plans that would perhaps satisfy a freedom-conscious India. As a result of these deliberations, a form of free government known as provincial autonomy was granted, and came into force in 1937.

This arrangement left India more or less free in various states, or provinces, with the British Viceroy (now Lord Linlithgow) still the supreme ruler at the capital of New Delhi.



We must not, in our impatient anger, resort to stupid violence. We freely admit that we must take our due share of blame for the existing state. It is not so much British guns that are responsible for our subjection as our voluntary co-operation.

IN the midst of his work for communal harmony and the welfare of untouchables, Gandhi transferred his ashram, or headquarters, from Sabarmati to a remote little village in the centre of India, near Wardha. This came to be known as Sevagram.

The Mahatma chose this place because, symbolically, he would be in the centre of the country he loved so deeply. It also afforded him practical scope to fulfil his ideal of living with and serving the country's down-trodden villagers. In course of time, thanks to the presence of Gandhi, Sevagram became the virtual capital of India.

Gandhi's Indian National Congress ruled in six provinces under his indirect but effective guidance, and all the ministries that had been formed for the purpose did all they could to implement the Gandhian schemes for the regeneration of the people under their charge.

There was much progress in the spheres of education, social welfare and village uplift. India seemed to be approaching a new age of freedom and self-realisation, when suddenly everything changed.

The war clouds that had been gathering over a Hitler-dominated Europe finally burst when, on the

3rd of September 1939, England declared official war on Germany.

This, from the point of view of world peace, was bad enough. What was worse as far as peace-loving India was concerned was that as part of the British Empire, this great country that was a continent in itself, was also dragged into the world conflict much against her will, literally 'by the scratch of a pen'. By way of protest, all the Congress governments in power resigned from office.

Gandhi was at pains to make India's position and attitude quite clear to India, to Britain and to the world. While, as in the case of the First World War of 1914-18, India did not wish to convert "England's hour of difficulty into India's hour of opportunity," it was, he maintained, unreasonable to expect India to fight for freedom while her own hands were still in fetters and her feet still in chains.

The Mahatma appealed to the British to offer something substantial in terms of freedom, something that would serve as an incentive for "slaves to fight for freedom".

England's response, however, was far from en-

couraging. To use Gandhi's own words, "we asked for bread and we were given a stone."

Because India was impatient, as Nehru put it, to experience "the glow of freedom," the Indian National Congress even offered to abandon the policy of non-violence and to wage an effective war against Nazism and Fascism if it was permitted to do so under the auspices of freedom.

There was much to be said about this offer, if only because it meant parting company with Gandhi, whose adherence to non-violence could never know any compromise.

When even this offer was not accepted, Gandhi realised that some practical measures would have to be taken to inform India and the world that India was not a willing participant in a war that was not of her making, and in which she had no stake.

He accordingly devised a campaign of non-cooperation and anti-war propaganda which he termed individual satyagraha. For this campaign, Gandhi himself selected volunteers to deliver speeches advocating India's abstinence from war.

The first volunteer selected was Vinoba Bhave.

came Jawaharlal Nehru, who was arrested and sentenced to four years in jail.

This response from the British deeply shocked oppressed India, but it also provided more ammunition for Gandhi in his non-violent struggle.

This struggle continued for about a year, until September 1941, when the entry of the Japanese in the Pacific led to a change in England's attitude to India.

Nehru was soon out of jail and events seemed to be leading to a climax in Indo-British relations, without Gandhi.

The climax came in the middle of 1942, at a time and in a manner that could not have been anticipated the previous year.

No man can be said to be good before
his death. After I am gone, no single person
will be able completely to represent me.
But a little bit of me
will live in many of you.



WE now come to some of the most important events in the life of Gandhi, events which were also among the most decisive in India's entire history.

The events moved fast and with dramatic suddenness, constituting in real life a situation which fiction could hardly rival.

At a certain stage in the course of the second World War, Britain's warrior Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, had occasion to proclaim that he had not become the King's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.

History, however, had other ideas. A great blow was struck to this Empire with the surrender of Singapore to the Japanese in March 1942. Reeling under this blow, the Empire, Sir Winston included, realised that something had to be done, and quickly too, to stem the Japanese advance.

Nothing could be done, however, in the eastern theatre of war, with a sullen India demanding her birthright of freedom. And so, as a concession to Indian sentiments, or so the British imagined, Sir Stafford Cripps, reputed to be a good friend of this country, was despatched post-haste to India by

Churchill's Government, bringing with him the famous Cripps Offer.

Sir Stafford came to India with some good intentions and, of course, great expectations. Alas! He came, he saw, he spoke, he discussed, he conferred and he negotiated, but he did not conquer.

With an apt use of words that could convey so much in so little, Gandhi described the Cripps Offer as "a post-dated cheque on a falling bank." Cripps returned to England, leaving an India behind him that was angrier and more dissatisfied than ever before.

And then it happened. To an India, and a world, that was anxiously posing the question "what next?" Gandhi provided the answer. It was an answer, moreover, in which, for those with ears, the voice of history was eloquent.

As Gandhi said later, the answer came to him as he retired for the night in the open air on a hot June night in his ashram. Gazing at the stars, he realised in a flash that the British must quit India—this not so much for the benefit of India as for that of Britain herself.

With the Japanese threatening to invade India at

any moment, it became necessary, as Gandhi asserted, to mobilise the country's man-power for the defence of the country. A stage had thus been reached when India's freedom could not wait, not even for a moment.

Thus was born Gandhi's famous "Quit India" movement of 1942, which was soon to rock the country from end to end.

India now began to live through exciting days, with no knowing what the morrow would bring. Soon the entire country became "Quit India" conscious.

After careful thought and much discussion, Gandhi's plan was approved by the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress on 14th July 1942. The final approval was to be given by the All India Congress Committee, which was to meet in Bombay on 7th August.

Excitement mounted as the day of days approached. Not India alone, but the entire world watched, and waited. Now, also, like a decade earlier, was there "thunder in the air."

The eyes of the world were on Gandhi as he addressed the opening session of the momentous Bombay meeting on Friday, 7th August. The global

conflict that was raging at the time seemed to be relegated into the background as the little man in loincloth held the stage.

Gandhi explained in detail what his "Quit India" plan demanded and implied. Thereafter, the discussions and deliberations proceeded for two days, until the evening of Saturday, 8th August.

In his closing address, Gandhi exhorted his countrymen to "act as free men and women," and to "do or die" in defence of their freedom.

The meeting over, Gandhi left for his residence and soon retired for the night. Early on Sunday morning, August 9th, he was awakened and informed that he and his party were to be arrested and detained in prison.

Along with him were arrested all the members of the Congress Working Committee, as well as prominent Congress leaders all over India. Once again arose the question: "what next?"



A life of sacrifice is
a pinnacle of art, and is
full of true joy which
ever renews itself.

A man is never surfeited
with it, and the spring of
interest is inexhaustible.

Indulgences lead to
destruction.

Renunciation leads
to immortality.

INDIA now found herself leaderless, but her spirit of mass resistance to the iron hand of foreign rule was not shaken.

When Gandhi was whisked off to prison, he expected that each person in a struggling India would now act according to individual judgement of the situation.

He knew that the action of the rulers would be considered and accepted as a challenge, but not even he could have imagined that the country's freedom-loving people would be "goaded to a point of madness," and react with such grim and sustained violence.

For six months, from August 1942 to February 1943, there was much tumult and shouting all over the country. Violence seemed to reign supreme, and India's patriots, now rendered freedom-mad, considered nothing too much to disrupt foreign rule and foreign oppression.

The British Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, then did something that brought matters to a head. He blamed Gandhi for the various acts of violence, disruption and sabotage that were sweeping across the country, and this was when the Mahatma decided to act, in the only way possible under the circumstances.

He wrote to the Viceroy, explaining in emphatic terms his side of the story, and pointing out that it was useless to expect a normal situation despite the abnormal acts of the rulers.

He further proclaimed his decision to undertake a 21-day fast. With this decision, the authorities were compelled to make public the correspondence between Gandhi and the Viceroy.

The nation was shocked by the Mahatma's decision to subject himself to the rigours of a fast at the advanced age of seventy-four. Many tried hard to dissuade him, fearing for his very life. But, for him, there was no withdrawing from a decision once arrived at.

This time, the purpose of the fast was two-fold. On the one hand, it was to be a silent protest against the anti-freedom policies and repressive measures of the foreign rulers. Through this act of self-inflicted suffering, an imprisoned Gandhi sought to regain his "voice", to reassert India's right to be free.

On the other hand, the fast was intended to wean India's leaderless masses from the ways of violence, to proclaim, to India and the world, that as far as Gandhi

was concerned, non-violence was still the creed of India.

The great fast commenced in the third week of February. India, as also the world, watched, waited and prayed with bated breath.

In each head, on each lip, was the question: would the years take their toll, and frail health succumb to the physical ordeal of prolonged abstinence from food, or would the deathless spirit of a saint-warrior achieve the virtually impossible and record a miracle in the history of medical science?

The world waited, watched and prayed.

February ended, and March began. More waiting, and watching, and praying. Behind the people of India stood the foreign rulers of India, apparently unconcerned, tough and unyielding, and fully prepared for the worst, should it occur.

At one stage during the Mahatma's fast, a prominent leader, returning grim-faced from a meeting with Gandhi, announced that "only a miracle will save him."

The nation heard these ominous words, and

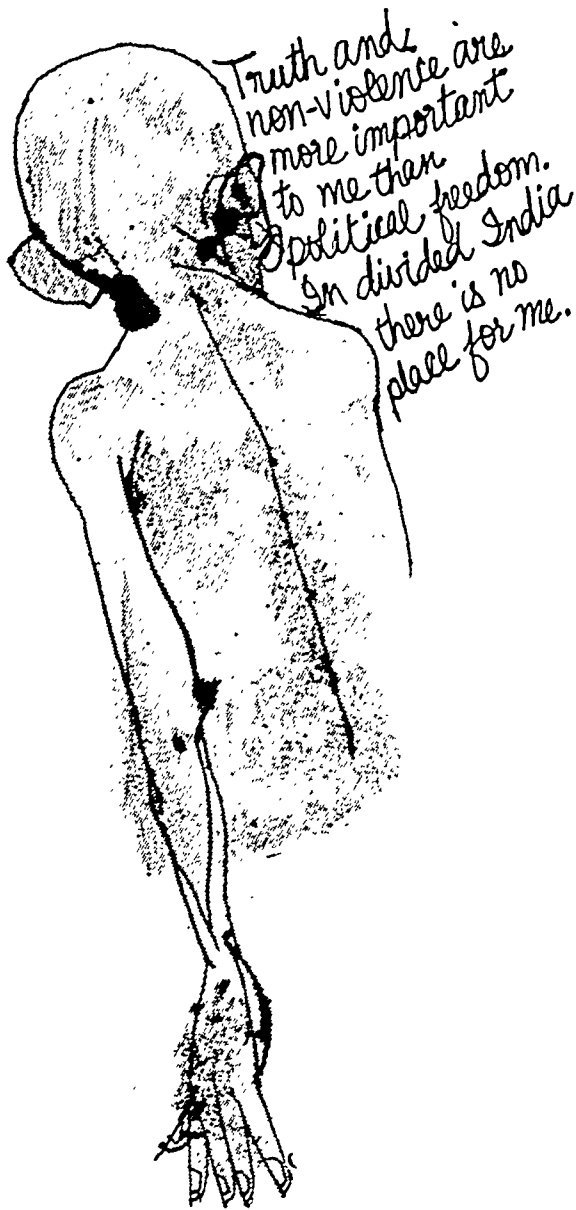
prayed harder. And then, when the crucial days of March ticked away, they brought with them the dawn of hope.

At long last, the 21-day period passed, and with it passed the crisis. The fast was over, and Gandhi was safe.

India rejoiced, while the medical world was astounded. Gandhi himself emerged from the ordeal much weaker in body, but also much stronger in spirit.

Once more, he had saved the honour of India and vindicated his philosophy of non-violence. Once more, he had demonstrated how much more can be achieved when suffering is self-inflicted and not imposed by others.

Following the fast, India entered a period of troubled calm. It was a lull between two storms. One had already occurred. The other was soon to come.



Truth and
non-violence are
more important
to me than
political freedom.
In divided India
there is no
place for me.

GANDHI's fast of 1943 ended on a happy note, but during this prison term, two sad events caused him personal pain and sorrow.

About a month after his arrest, in September 1942, death took away from his side his personal secretary, Mahadev Desai, who, during his lifetime, had been much valued and had achieved well-merited fame as the Mahatma's faithful and loyal co-worker and very able interpreter of his philosophy.

In February 1944, death knocked again at Gandhi's prison door, this time to claim his dearly beloved wife, devoted companion and self-effacing helpmate, Kasturba.

For over sixty years, the brave little woman had stood and walked by his side, unmindful of the demands that Gandhi's life and work made on her frail being, bearing the trials and tribulations and spurning the fame that was inevitable.

And now, she was no more. Gandhi bore his great loss with characteristic courage. A human touch was provided in the tragic drama when, during the cremation ceremony of Kasturba, he was seen to wipe a solitary tear from his sorrow-filled eyes.

About three months later, Gandhi himself fell ill, and this gave a golden opportunity to the British rulers of India to release him, "on medical grounds", as it was announced with all due official care.

The Mahatma was now out of his prison, but even in his so-called freedom he was restless, since, to him, a subject India was itself a vast prison.

Nevertheless, freedom for Gandhi meant hope for India. And so, the eyes of all, in India, and the world outside, were once more on the great little man in loincloth.

Some months after his release, a meeting was arranged between the Mahatma and Mohamed Ali Jinnah, who was at that time the President of the Muslim League of India and who was later to figure in a more historical role as the founder and first Governor-General of Pakistan.

Hopes soared high as Gandhi and Jinnah settled down to long talks in Bombay. It was rightly believed that if an agreement were to be reached between these two key figures in the political world of India, the nation would come much closer to her cherished objective of freedom.

This, however, was not to be. The talks continued for a few days, and then it became known, to the bitter disappointment of millions, that an agreement could not be reached between Gandhi and Jinnah, the spokesmen of the two major political parties in India. Time, it seemed, was intent upon marching backwards.

India's hopes were raised anew when the nation's other imprisoned leaders were released in June 1945, following the end of the war in Europe. With his friends and colleagues free, Gandhi could now, in consultation with them, evolve a final formula for the freedom of India.

History, however, had other plans, as subsequent events were to prove.

For two years, from June 1945 to June 1947, India was the scene of discussions, meetings, conferences and, of course, great expectations. The talking was done by the various Indian parties on the one side, and the British rulers on the other.

In 1946, a British Cabinet Mission, which included India's old friend and well-wisher, Sir Stafford Cripps, visited the country to make a final attempt to settle the Indo-British political problems.

An important point to be noted is that all these activities took place in an atmosphere that was quite different from the one that had prevailed a few years ago. The 1945 elections in England had brought to power a Labour government under Prime Minister Attlee that seemed to be sincere in its desire to place India firmly on the road to freedom.

The other important point was that, as India's leaders began to walk along this road, they seemed to do so unaccompanied by Gandhi. He was, of course, always available for consultations, and extended his advice and guidance freely. But, as far as he was concerned, it seemed to be a case of all letter and no spirit.

This was perhaps due to the fact that as India approached the long-cherished dawn of freedom, the Mahatma, with his unerring instinct, had a premonition of the sad shape of things to come. He was opposed to a philosophy of freedom that was based merely on political arrangements, which, he felt, were coming to the fore, at the cost of more enduring values.

His worst fears were realised when, in June 1947, the Congress, mainly at the behest of the last British Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, accepted freedom for

India at the great cost of a division of the country. Thus was Pakistan born, and thus also was Gandhi's life-long dream of Hindu-Muslim concord and a united India shattered beyond repair.

It was, therefore, one of history's supreme ironies that Gandhi, the man who had devoted his life and everything in it to the freedom of India, was weighed down with sadness when this freedom became a reality. But worse was to come.

On the 15th of August 1947, India became a free nation. There was much rejoicing all over the country as the foreign flag came down and the flag of free India, for which so many had done so much, went up.

Gandhi, however, did not rejoice. He stood apart from the milling multitudes, from the tumult of joyous celebrations and the shouting of his freedom-hungry countrymen. He stood, and watched, and waited.

Alas, he did not have long to wait. In the wake of the revelry came bloodshed and deeds most foul. There were riots, attacks and counter-attacks. Muslim massacred Hindu and Hindu, Muslim. A darkness of unprecedented density, a darkness of the soul, seemed to enshroud the country.

In the midst of this darkness, Gandhi moved, and talked, and healed, as much as one man, be he a superman, could heal.

Armed with nothing save his hope, his faith and his courage, he made long journeys through India's riot-torn and blood-soaked areas, to wipe the tears off the faces of his panic-stricken countrymen.

There were none, alas, to wipe away Gandhi's own tears. Perhaps none could do so because the tears were unshed, invisible... .

Gandhi, however, did suffer agony and heartbreak over his shattered dreams. He had worked, and hoped, and sacrificed everything for an India that would be free, unified and non-violent. And now, wherever he turned his gaze, he saw disunity and violence. In his estimation, therefore, the flag that fluttered, the flag of India's freedom, seemed to mock the very skies.

India was free, yes, but the freedom of Gandhi's dream was nowhere in sight. For him, therefore, the times bespoke a beginning of the end.

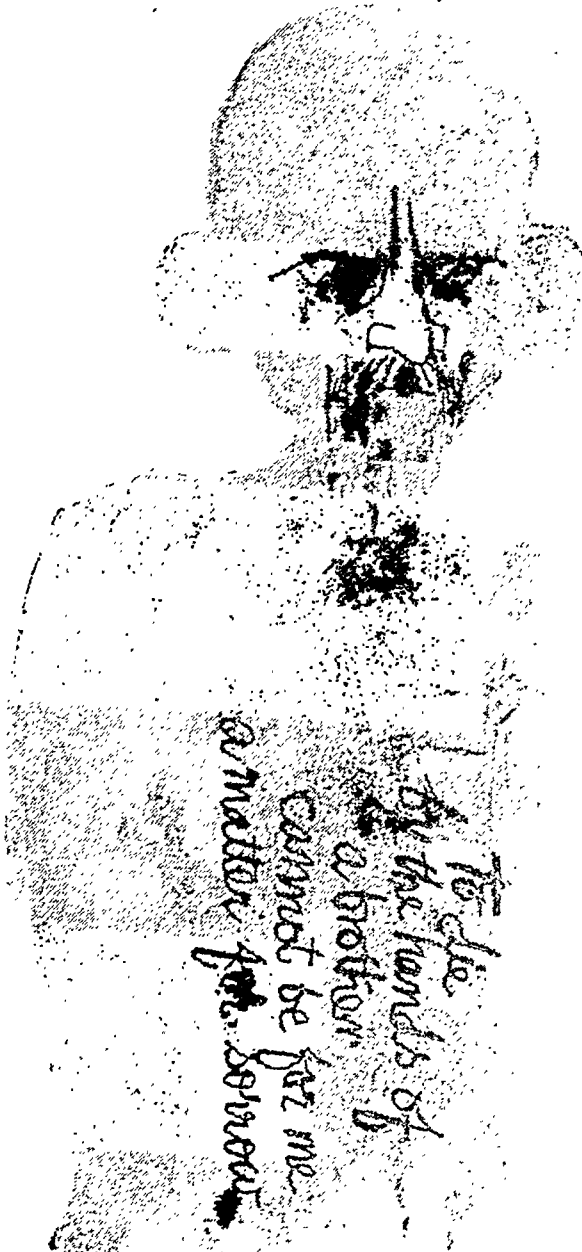
THE day was Friday, 30th January 1948. The time, about 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

Emerging with his companions from the Delhi residence of his host, Gandhi stepped briskly into a cold winter evening and hurried to his place of prayer, where the usual crowd of devotees awaited him.

Scarcely had he appeared at the customary spot when a grim-faced man, Godse by name, stood up a few feet away from him and fired four shots at point-blank range. Before the stunned assembly could realise what had happened, Gandhi was tenderly carried away from the scene, mortally wounded. Inside of half an hour he was dead.

Within another hour, the tragic news was sent speeding, throughout India and around the world. And then, sorrow and grief, intense and spontaneous, engulfed humanity. Everyone wept unashamedly; little children and grown-up men and women, rich and poor, those in high places and the humble folk in their huts and hovels.

In the death of Gandhi, each human being seemed to experience a death of part of himself. His was the heart that had beat in unison with the heart of



To die
by the hands of
a brother
cannot be for me
a matter for sorrow.

humanity everywhere. And when the mighty heart of Gandhi stopped beating, humanity itself seemed to be no more.

In a moving tribute to a great Indian and an even greater human being, the United Nations lowered its flag at its headquarters. In India, throughout the country, flags flew at half-mast during a 13-day period of national mourning. For a much longer period, the head, and the heart, of India were also lowered, in shame and sorrow.

Long after the tragic event, many questions were asked in many places. They were angry questions posed by anguished hearts, and they all demanded answers, most of which were not forthcoming.

How and why was Gandhi assassinated? Why had adequate precautions against such a fatal attempt on his life not been taken, particularly as, a few days prior to the 30th of January, a bomb had been thrown at him during a prayer meeting?

Moreover, what reason, or reasons, had prompted the assassin to perform his foul and outrageous act? Was it merely because of Gandhi's solicitude for the Muslims, and, by implication, for Pakistan, for the

Muslims who, despite all that had happened, were still, for him, dear and precious brethren?

Was this reason enough for the perpetration of one of the most ignoble acts in history? Were there other reasons, or was the tragedy preordained by a grim historical process which demands that the great ones of the world, God's chosen prophets, always water the tree of Truth with their blood?

Answers to such questions may or may not come easily, but there are some questions for which answers must be sought, now and in all the days to come.

One of these is this: What are we doing, and, also, what are we not doing, to be worthy of what Gandhi dreamed about, and dared, and did?

If we elect to walk along the Gandhian way and be equal to his great heritage, will we, can we, realise that, instead of worshipping him as a god, we should study the Mahatma as a man, and follow him as a leader?

Mere devotion to the man and his creed will, at best, be a futile pursuit. It will signify the end, even before the beginning, of the better world for which Gandhi gave so much, including his very life.

EPILOGUE

THE history books of all countries are full, perhaps over-full, of the inspiring stories of enlightened beings who so lived their life that they blazed a trail of glory, leaving clearly their "footsteps on the sands of time."

The same history books inform us that following these footsteps were those devoted multitudes, the disciples of the great ones, who blissfully imagined that their duty as followers began and ended with words and songs of praise and adoration, and with the chanting of loud hallelujahs.

Because these so-called followers could do no more than praise, and pray, and sing, and speak, and shout, they proved to be of little use, to themselves, to their prophets and their philosophies and to the world at large.

Perhaps that is why, if we may borrow a phrase from Shakespeare's Macbeth, the world's loudly proclaimed march to civilization has been "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

This must not happen in the case of Gandhi, and when we say must not, we should do so with all due sincerity and emphasis, if only because there are several indications that it is very likely to happen.

The danger signals are the methods which we have adopted to honour the Mahatma since his death twenty years ago. Speeches, statues, road-naming and good intentions. Many things, in short, with the lips and the head; little or nothing with the heart.

We, the people of India, particularly the young people, those who are the trustees of India's future, must realise that our Gandhian heritage is no ordinary one. It is a great historical privilege that demands the best from us all, certainly something more than just happy words and good intentions.

Gandhi was nothing if not a man of action, and if we are to be true to him and to what he represented, then we, too, must act, the way he did. And for this action, we must seek our inspiration from the sublime and the significant words of the poet Longfellow, who wanted us to

act, act, in the living present;
heart within and God overhead.

Again a question that demands an answer, perhaps many answers, the biggest question of them all:

How are we to act? How, and when, and where?

The answer to this question, though a big one, is also a very simple one.

In all our action, always, everywhere, we must be guided by the light of Truth, as Gandhi was. Which means that we must always do what is right, even if it is not convenient, or fashionable, or profitable to do so.

In the light of Truth, we see for ourselves, very clearly, why, in order to live happily, we must love generously, and unconditionally.

And love for our fellow-men takes us, also in the light of Truth, to a state of living and thinking where we have complete faith in God.

If, however, all these happy things are to come to pass, prevailing values must change, prejudices must fade away and we must cling to the belief that there is a world of meaning in these golden words of Christ: "Blessed are the Meek, for they shall inherit the Earth."

When must we start to work for the better, the happier world of Gandhi—tomorrow, next week, next month? No, the time to start is now, today, this very minute, for any other time may be too late.

And who must start the good work? Our neighbour, our brother, or our friend? No, the best, and therefore the first person to "act, act in the living present" is you, who are reading this. Why? because as a very wise man reminded us long, long ago:

If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in character. If there is beauty in character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

In terms of life and death as we know them, the final chapter of the story of Gandhi was sad and shameful. Nevertheless, we, who come after him, have within us the power to change sadness into something else, if we so desire.

We know, and we glory in the knowledge, that, as already mentioned, God's chosen ones, the martyrs of mankind, are destined to water the tree of Truth with their blood. They then laugh at death by continuing to live—as the fruit of this tree.

Good trees, however, can only bear good fruit if good people tend them with love and dedication. If we are desirous of adding one more chapter to the

story of Gandhi, we can, as we should, function as good gardeners.

If we do, then in the days to come, men and women will read the story of the Mahatma thus: "Once upon a time, there was a man called Gandhi. And because those who loved him so willed it, he never died, but lived happily ever after."

TURNING POINTS

THE BOY

Born, 2nd October 1869, at Porbunder, on the west coast of India.

Married, at the age of thirteen, to Kasturba.

Some time later, he is impressed by, and begins to ponder over, the eternal values of truth in all matters of living and working.

In the light of his new-found love for truth, he makes a full confession to his father about his having eaten meat on one occasion.

When barely sixteen, Gandhi has his first experience of death in the passing of his father.

At the age of eighteen, Gandhi goes to England to study law.

While in England, he becomes interested in a society that promoted vegetarianism.

On his return to India, after a few years, he is confronted by the sad news of the death of his mother.

He then settles down to his work as a lawyer.

He goes to South Africa in 1893 as a lawyer on behalf of an Indian firm.

He has his first encounter with colour prejudice and race laws when he is thrown out of a first class railway compartment.

He is deeply pained, not only by the treatment meted out to him, but also at the plight of his countrymen in South Africa.

He convenes a meeting of the Indians resident in Pretoria, in 1894, and impresses upon them the necessity of organising themselves as a more progressive community.

Later, instead of returning to India on the completion of his legal work, he decides to remain in South Africa and wage a struggle against the growing wrongs of race prejudice.

He returns to India in 1896, only to acquaint his country with what is happening in South Africa, and win national support for the struggle ahead.

On his second visit to South Africa, he is violently attacked by race-mad mobs.

When war breaks out between the Dutch settlers in South Africa and the British, Gandhi forms an Indian Ambulance Corps to help the Government.

In 1905, he decides to live in a farm at Phoenix, near Durban, and to practise the austerities of ashram life.

He is jailed for leading a resistance movement against a law requiring all Indians to register with the authorities.

He meets General Smuts, and an agreement is reached regarding this law.

He is attacked, and injured, by some of his own followers who have misunderstood his motives.

Another struggle looms ahead when a South African court rules that non-Christian marriages are not valid.

Gandhi leads a batch of about two thousand followers across the Natal-Transvaal border, asking them not to resist if arrested.

Gandhi is arrested, not once but on several occasions.

Later, Gandhi meets General Smuts again, as a result of which some hateful laws, including that concerning Indian marriages, are abolished.

His work in South Africa over, Gandhi sails for India and is tumultuously welcomed back to his Motherland in January 1915.

He meets the great leader, Gokhale, in Poona, and receives his first words of advice as a prospective leader of India.

He settles down in a place near Ahmedabad, where he establishes a satyagraha ashram.

He expresses his views on the Gandhian way of life at the opening of the Banaras Hindu University in 1916. Some are impressed. Many are shocked.

Back at his ashram, Gandhi begins his work for the uplift of the Harijans, India's untouchables.

He agrees to help the peasants of Champaran, Bihar, to resist the demand for payment by British planters.

Gandhi is summoned to court for disobeying orders. The case against him, however, is dropped, and the peasants receive back the money paid by them.

At Ahmedabad, Gandhi meets the owners of textile mills, and pleads for relief for the workers. He undertakes a protest fast, after which a settlement is reached.

Later, in 1919, Gandhi proclaims a hartal, a stoppage of all work, to express India's dissatisfaction over the political situation in the country.

This eventually leads to the tragedy at Jallianwala Bagh, on 13 April 1919 where 379 are killed and 1137 injured due to unprovoked and brutal military action.

The nation is furious, and Gandhi is deeply distressed.

He attends a Muslim conference at Delhi, where a protest is launched against the British treatment of Turkey. Hindu-Muslim unity is fostered.

Gandhi first thinks of non-co-operation in terms of boycott of schools, colleges, jobs, titles, courts, foreign cloth, etc.

THE MAHATMA

The great Indian leader, Lokmanya Tilak, dies in August 1920. Gandhi takes his place, and is hailed as

a Mahatma by Tagore on behalf of the grateful people of India.

Gandhi begins his move to “purify India”. Boycott of foreign cloth and the popularisation of khadi (handspun cloth) are launched on a nation-wide scale.

His first non-co-operation movement in India begins, but is suspended in 1922 when it is marred by violence in a place called Chauri Chaura.

Gandhi is arrested, tried and sentenced to six years in jail.

He is released in 1924 before his term expires following an operation for appendicitis. He finds the country subjected to Hindu-Muslim tension and riots, and undertakes a 21-day purification fast on behalf of communal unity.

He leads a boycott of the ill-constituted Simon Commission, which had been sent to India to study conditions and recommend political reforms.

He launches satyagraha in Bardoli, Gujarat, as a protest against an increase in land tax. The movement, led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, is crowned with success.

Jawaharlal Nehru unfurls the flag of freedom at Lahore at midnight on 31 December 1929.

The Dandi March. Gandhi walks from Sabarmati Ashram, at Ahmedabad, to Dandi beach, 241 miles away, to manufacture salt illegally in defiance of the salt laws. The second non-co-operation movement is now in full swing. The year is 1930.

Gandhi is arrested, along with most of the top leaders of his Congress Party. He is later released, and agrees to attend the Second Round Table Conference in London in 1931.

The Conference fails. Gandhi returns to India, and is soon arrested. He is later distressed over attempts politically to divide the Harijans from high-caste Hindus.

He undertakes a protest fast. The country is stirred. Gandhi is later released, and his mission is crowned with success. The Harijans are admitted into the Hindu fold.

He settles down in Sevagram, a village near the town of Wardha in central India. He decides to devote himself to the welfare of India's villagers.

September 3, 1939. World War II breaks out. Gandhi does not wish to embarrass Britain, but asks for some assurance of freedom.

No such assurance is forthcoming. In Gandhi's words, "we asked for bread, and received a stone."

He starts an Individual Satyagraha campaign in the autumn of 1940. The first volunteer is Vinoba Bhave; the second is Jawaharlal Nehru.

The mission to India of Sir Stafford Cripps in the spring of 1942. The mission fails.

August 8, 1942. The Quit India Resolution of Gandhi is passed at a momentous Congress session in Bombay.

August 9, 1942. Gandhi and all the top leaders of the Congress are arrested all over India and detained in prison.

September 1942. Gandhi suffers a great loss in the death of Mahadev Desai, his secretary and disciple.

February 1943. Gandhi commences a 21-day fast in his prison in the Aga Khan Palace, at Poona.

February 1944. Kasturba, Gandhi's wife, dies in prison.

May 1944. Gandhi is released, "on health grounds".

Gandhi-Jinnah talks are held in Bombay in September 1944. They end in failure.

The other Congress leaders are released in June 1945. India now seems poised for big decisions.

A three-man mission on behalf of the British Cabinet visits India. Freedom is in sight, and so is the division of the country. Gandhi voices his protest against the proposed move.

Congress agrees to division, and the creation of Pakistan on 3 June 1947. A sad and disillusioned Gandhi then spends his time and thought extinguishing the flames of communal conflict which engulf India.

India finally becomes free on 15 August 1947.

THE MARTYR

The violence and bloodshed of communal riots continue. Gandhi undertakes a fast—his last.

Friday, January 30, 1948. Gandhi is shot at a prayer meeting by the assassin, Godse. He succumbs after about 30 minutes. A great and dedicated life comes to an end.



Pearl Books

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